

Readers of a nervous disposition, turn away! This issue of *The Bottle Imp* pursues the spectre of the Gothic. Naught but ruined towers, blasted heaths, and cold wastes lie within.

Horror seeps in to this our waking world from the margins, and the marginalised. Scotland lies on Britain's edge, a ragged, ancient fringe. The very rocks beneath our feet are primeval: they count their years in billions, and were old past knowing when first things sneaked and scuttled from out the slime. The skin is thinner here, stretched more tightly over the bones of the Earth.

All this, as Kirsty MacDonald points out in [Scottish Gothic: Towards a Definition](#), makes Scotland the perfect setting for Gothic fiction: Shakespeare himself chose supernatural horror as the backdrop for *Macbeth*. It is a wild place, a northern place, a place of ghosts and revenants. So it must seem to a Southern reader, tucked down in green English vales, nestled between her bosomy hillocks. Safe behind the wall the Romans built, to keep the fear out on the other side.

So do we appear to the civilised outsider. How then do we see ourselves? Alan Bissett probes our uneasy present, in [Damage Land Revisited](#); and Monica Germanà finds the Gothic tradition is still haunting contemporary Scottish women's writing, in her article [Embodying the Spectral Self](#).

Scotland takes the Gothic to heart, and it is engrained in our literature. Hardly a single Scottish writer is wholly free from its cold fingers. Stevenson was so wrapped up in it he couldn't keep it out, even from his Boys Adventure stories; think of *Treasure Island*'s Israel Hands, or the strange, disturbing Tale of Tod Lapraik which lurks between the pages of *Catriona*, waiting to pounce on the unwary reader.

Where does this fascination stem from? The Scottish Reformation, perhaps, is one source. Where Henry VIII instituted an administrative takeover in England's Church, John Knox made God and Satan personal and lodged Heaven and Hell especially Hell in Scotland's heart. England, for example, hunted witches in a

desultory fashion, all too ready to let in reason, acquitting women accused of flying on the technicality that it was not against the law. Scots, though, rooted out their witches with fundamental zeal, and the flames of the last burnings cast a ruddy glow across the dawning Enlightenment. Organised religion met disorganised superstition most clearly in the Reverend Robert Kirk's *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies*. The good Reverend, though, lost out in the end. Let us hope the same fate does not befall Alison Grant, as she explores the marks the [sidh](#) have left on Scotland's landscape.

In Scotland, the Other is never far away. Often, indeed, it lurks within: a Scottish child speaks one way in the classroom, and another in the playground. The Scots voice is that of the outsider, the excluded – or so at least we were taught. In this issue's Scots Word of the Season, Maggie Scott lifts up the lid of [eldritch](#), surely H. P. Lovecraft's favourite adjective.

Then there is the split between Highland and Lowland; between Protestant and Catholic; even between Edinburgh and Glasgow. Glasgow, perhaps, has buried most of her old hauntings beneath cracked concrete. But Edinburgh – a mad god's dream – Edinburgh wears her horror on her sleeve, and Louise Welsh draws up the city's influence upon the Gothic visions of [James Pryde: The Edgar Allan Poe of Painting](#).

The year draws to a close, and the dim sun skims low across the horizon. For the long dark nights ahead, *The Bottle Imp* offers this entreaty:

From ghoulies and ghosties
And long-leggity beasties
And things that go bump in the night,
Good Lord, deliver us!

The Unreliable Narrator

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